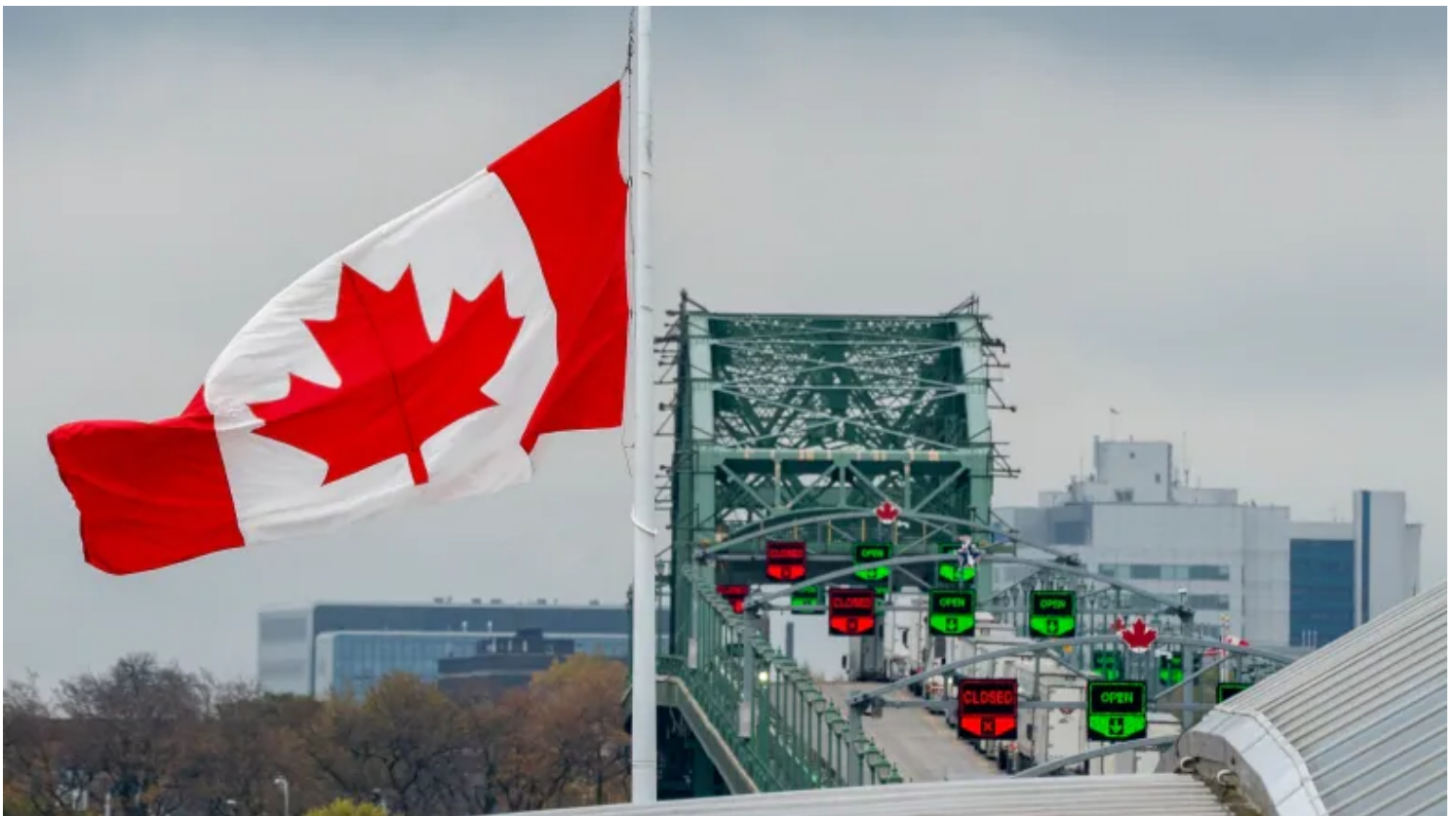


Politics

Federal government now says all truckers crossing border must be fully vaccinated

Clarification comes day after government spokesperson mistakenly said Canadian truckers would be exempt

[Peter Zimonjic](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 12, 2022 10:20 PM ET | Last Updated: January 13



U.S.-bound trucks are seen lining up on the Peace Bridge in Fort Erie, Ont., on Oct. 21, 2020. (Frank Gunn/The Canadian Press)

All truck drivers crossing the border must be fully vaccinated as of Saturday, regardless of whether they are Canadian citizens or foreign nationals, the federal government said Thursday.

Confusion over the controversial policy has been widespread since the federal government first announced in mid-November that by Jan. 15, all foreign nationals working as truckers would have to be fully vaccinated to enter Canada.

The same announcement said unvaccinated Canadian truckers would be allowed in, but would be subject to quarantine and testing requirements.

On Wednesday, a spokesperson for the Canada Border Services Agency said the federal government was backing down from that commitment and would allow Canadian truckers to enter the country without having to quarantine even if they were unvaccinated or had received only one dose.

Today, the federal government walked back that statement, saying that Wednesday's statement was "provided in error" and that the regulations outlined in November will stand.

Transport Minister Omar Alghabra told CBC News Network's *Power & Politics* that while the spokesperson had "incomplete" information, the federal government's policy has not changed.

"Since November 19 we've been consistent in all of our meetings with stakeholders, in all of our interviews with the public," he said.



Transport minister says spokesperson had 'incomplete information' on vaccine rules

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Transport Minister Omar Alghabra says a government spokesperson 'misspoke' about the government's position on its vaccine mandate for truckers.

Trade associations on both sides of the border had been pushing for a delay to the restriction, [which they say would put additional strain](#) on supply chains amid the latest COVID-19 surge and severe worker shortages.

About 10 per cent of the 120,000 Canadian truckers who cross the border may not be able to work those routes because they haven't been vaccinated, according to the trucking alliance.

Cash bonuses to get vaccinated

The vaccine mandate is already starting to affect trucking operations.

"There are many of our members who have already said they will not be dispatching unvaccinated drivers across the border," said Canadian Trucking Alliance president Stephen

Laskowski.

Transport companies never opposed the vaccine mandate, Laskowski said.

"It's the timing of it," he added, citing factors putting pressure on supply chains, such as clogged ports and workers off sick.

- [Vaccine mandate for truckers could lead to mass layoffs and supply chain issues](#)
- [Critics, industry call on Ottawa to reconsider trucker vaccine mandate to protect supply chains](#)
- **AUDIO** [Trucking industry needs more time to meet U.S. border vaccine mandate, association says](#)

The new rule could encourage reluctant workers to roll up their sleeves. One Montreal-based logistics company offered a \$10,000 bonus last month to all drivers who received their first vaccine dose by mid-January in the hopes of retaining employees and boosting inoculation rates.

The impact on supply chains

Guy Milette, executive vice-president of the Quebec based fruit and vegetable importer Courchesne Larose Ltd., said the mandate will put pressure on prices and the supply of goods, especially given the time of year.

From "January up to April is the worst of the year and [sees] the highest percentage of imported vegetables," he told CBC News. "So the impact that we're [talking] about today, it's coming in the worst portion ... of the year."

Ontario-based Titanium Transportation Group, which boasts a fleet of 800 tractors, says 95 per cent of its drivers are fully vaccinated.

"More than likely there's no good time, right? They've had this exemption for quite a long time. So maybe this is the right time," CEO Ted Daniel said.

- [What's behind a trucker shortage in Canada? Britain's labour crisis offers a clue](#)
- **VIDEO** [How a truck driver shortage could impact supply chain](#)

Still, trade groups have been calling on the federal government to postpone the Saturday deadline.

Recent flooding in British Columbia and China's "zero-COVID policy" have added to supply-chain bottlenecks, the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition said in a letter signed by 18 industry association heads who are asking for a delay.

The Petroleum Services Association of Canada said the vaccine mandate will "only aggravate things further."

Food and agricultural products could also feel the squeeze.

Nearly two-thirds of the roughly \$21 billion in agri-food imports that Canada receives from the United States each year arrive by truck, according to Sylvain Charlebois, a Dalhousie University professor of food distribution and policy. The reliance on U.S. products is especially high in winter.

Fuelling inflation

Conservative MP Melissa Lantsman said the vaccine mandate for truckers will add to the country's supply chain woes and drive up prices even further.

"At a time when inflation is already at a record high, Canadians will be the ones paying the price for the Trudeau government's poor policy decisions. Canada's Conservatives will be the voice of Canadians who are being priced out of their own lives in Justin Trudeau's economy," she said in a media statement.

Alhabra disagreed with that statement, telling *Power & Politics* guest host David Cochrane that the biggest threat to the supply chain is not a vaccine mandate but the pandemic, and vaccination is the only way to beat it.

"We take our advice from experts, from public health experts, and everybody knows that vaccines are our best way out of this," he said. "Everybody knows that vaccines are the best way to protect supply chains, and we are proceeding with what we believe is the best thing for Canadians and Canada's economy."

'I won't comply'

Bridgitte Belton, an unvaccinated truck driver, said she and her husband, who is also a trucker, will not be getting vaccinated despite the trouble the mandate will cause for her financially when it kicks in on Saturday.

"I lose my truck. I lose my house. I lose my car. I basically will have absolutely nothing left," she told CBC News.

"I won't comply. I will not get the shot in the arm. Who am I really protecting? I'm protecting somebody that lives in long term care. I don't go there ... I live in my truck. When I go home, I go home to my husband, who's also a truck driver."

Luis Franco Robles, a fully vaccinated truck driver from Alberta, told CBC News that he is in favour of the coming regulations, adding that imposing the mandate is the "right thing to do."

"It's a matter of public health, period ... And so we need to do our part ... as citizens, to do what's right for everybody else," he told CBC News.

"You cannot put your personal beliefs in front of this because you're affecting other people. It's a matter of life and death."

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